

**OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE
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CONTACT: BRENDAN DALY
AMY STILWELL
(202) 395-3230**

**FTAA Negotiating Groups Meet Ministerial Challenge;
USTR Releases Public Summaries of U.S. Positions**

United States Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky today announced that the nine negotiating groups of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) have accomplished the goal set by FTAA Ministers in November 1999, of preparing an initial draft, bracketed text reflecting the positions of all FTAA countries. The draft text will be submitted to the FTAA Ministers at their next meeting, to be held in Buenos Aires on April 6-7, 2001, and will constitute the text from which negotiations will proceed.

“Development of the draft FTAA text reflects substantial progress made by the negotiating groups during the past year,” said Ambassador Barshefsky. “This key achievement, accomplished through the hard work and commitment of negotiators from the U.S. and the other FTAA countries, represents a significant step toward the “Miami” goal of concluding the FTAA negotiations no later than 2005, and realistically places the hemisphere in a position to conclude these talks in 2003.”

Separately, Ambassador Barshefsky today released detailed summaries of the United States’ FTAA negotiating positions. The U.S. positions were developed with input from the full range of federal executive branch agencies, with advice from non-governmental sources and in consultation with Congress.

“These summaries outline the breadth of the U.S. positions and will form the basis for a continued domestic dialogue that will serve to hone and strengthen the U.S. position,” continued Ambassador Barshefsky. “We are confident that such a dialogue ultimately will lead to broader and stronger support for the FTAA.”

The summaries that are being released today cover each of the nine FTAA Negotiating Groups:

Market Access; Agriculture; Services; Investment; Intellectual Property; Government Procurement; Subsidies, Antidumping, Countervailing Duties; Competition Policy; and Dispute Settlement. In addition, summaries are being provided on U.S. positions on labor and environmental issues in the FTAA. The summaries are available on the USTR Web site (www.ustr.gov) and in the USTR Public Reading Room.

Background:

All 34 democratically-elected governments in the Western Hemisphere are participating in the FTAA negotiations, which have been held in Miami since September 1998. The ultimate goal of the negotiations is to create a comprehensive free trade agreement. The commitment of the 34 countries to conclude these negotiations no later than 2005 was made at the 1994 Summit of the Americas, which was hosted in Miami by President Clinton. At the Second Summit of the Americas, held in Santiago, Chile in April 1998, the Leaders initiated the formal negotiations under the nine Negotiating Groups. The next Summit of the Americas will be held in April of this year in Quebec City, Canada.

The initial draft chapters in these nine areas were developed based on texts proposed by individual countries or groups of countries (e.g., Andean Community, MERCOSUR). These texts have been consolidated to avoid duplication and to express clearly the range of positions to date. The draft text is available for review by cleared advisors, including all Members of Congress.